DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 330 112 EA 022 854

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TITLE A System for Statewide School Accountability: The Policy and Politics of Response.
PUB DATE Apr 91
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Chicago, IL, April 3-7, 1991).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Accountability; Educational Development; Educational Improvement; Elementary Secondary Education; Evaluation Criteria; *Evaluation Methods; *Evaluation Problems; *Politics of Education; *School Restructuring
IDENTIFIERS *Georgia

ABSTRACT

In 1985 the Georgia General Assembly passed the Quality Basic Education Act, recognizing needs in key areas such as provision of an equitable finance structure and staff development programs. A section of the act addresses planning and evaluation, mandating activities and requirements including a comprehensive evaluation of each public school, local school system, and regional educational service agency at least once every 5 years. Georgia's comprehensive evaluation system has two components (legal adherence and quality standards) and parallel components for regional agencies. Techniques and groups involved in developing the evaluation system are the Department Technical Advisory Board, Comprehensive Evaluation System (CES) Advisory Committee, CES Steering Committee, and Georgia Department of Education Planning Committee. Characteristics of a defensible evaluation program center around legal, ethical, technical, credibility, and practicality issues. Issues affecting future development of the system are described. (EJS)

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A SYSTEM FOR STATEWIDE SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY: THE POLICY AND POLITICS OF RESPONSE

Presented to
American Educational Research Association
1991 Annual Meeting

April 4, 1991

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A SYSTEM FOR STATEWIDE SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY:
THE POLICY AND POLITICS OF RESPONSE

Introduction

In 1983, Governor Joe Frank Harris of Georgia appointed a blue ribbon panel--the Governor's Education Review Commission-- to make recommendations to him regarding education. After almost two years of review, hearings, and intense study, the Education Review Commission presented two reports to the Governor; Priority for a Quality Basic Education, A First Report and Priority for A Quality Basic Education, A Second Report.

The reports were the basis for a far-reaching legislative package. Under the leadership of Governor Harris, the Georgia General Assembly drafted a plan for Georgia education, and the Quality Basic Education Act (QBE) replaced the Adequate Program for Education in Georgia (APEG). Being near the bottom of all states in several education categories was not acceptable; adequacy was to give way to quality. The new program for education was a "comprehensive reform of the total public elementary and secondary educational enterprise in Georgia. This reform begins with a definition of Quality Basic Education which consists of the competencies that Georgia children and youth will achieve; continues through the provision of resources, procedures, and assistance needed to ensure that QBE becomes a reality and ends with an extensive system of accountability designed to ensure that all aspects are fully and effectively functioning as intended or that correct action will be taken if they are not." (internal GDE memorandum, 4/11/85)

In the legislative session of 1985, the Georgia General Assembly unanimously passed the Quality Basic Education Act, and on April 16, 1985, in the presence of nearly all local system superintendents, Governor Harris signed the legislation. Georgia's education reform program was off and running. To begin the implementation of the reform package, 114 specific actions, required of the Georgia Board of Education, were identified. This list did not include actions to be taken by the Governor, the General Assembly, the Georgia Board of Regents, or Board of Human Resources; nor did it include actions to be continued from the Adequate Program for Education Act, the program superseded by the Quality Basic Education Act.

In the Quality Basic Education Act, which has had several primarily clarifying amendments, the General Assembly recognized needs in key areas, including:

1. Quality basic education curriculum;
2. Access to a quality education program for all children and youth of Georgia;
3. Provision of an equitable education finance structure;
4. Statewide standards to ensure that each student has access to a quality program;
5. Increase in the attractiveness and rewards of a teaching career;
6. Provision of effective staff development programs and attractive incentives for public school personnel to grow;
7. Provision of incentives, resources, and technical assistance to plan and implement improvement programs;
8. Provision of information on the quality of schools to parents and the general public;
9. Provision of appropriate facilities; and
10. Provision of a program to achieve items 1-9 to ensure a literate and informed society. (O.C.G.A., 20-2-131)

The idea of statewide standards (item 4) was not new to Georgia. Since 1964 a system of standards had been in place. The purpose of the original standards program was to set minimum criteria for the operation of schools in Georgia. In recognizing the need for establishing and maintaining "statewide standards which ensure that each student has access to a quality program," the General Assembly established a basis for accountability, and in the mandatory comprehensive evaluation, the General Assembly provided the vehicle for accountability.

Comprehensive Evaluation System Mandated

The Georgia QBE Act devotes a section to planning and evaluation which addresses strategic plans, assessment of students, comprehensive evaluation, and corrective actions. The effort to respond to the comprehensive evaluation system is the primary subject of the symposium.

The law is specific regarding the comprehensive evaluation and mandates the following activities or requirements.

1. The Georgia Board of Education is to supervise a comprehensive evaluation of each public school, local school system, and regional educational service agency at least once every five years.

2. All local units of administration are to be evaluated in comparison to other local units which have student bodies that are similar in demographic terms.

3. The following functions are to be evaluated:

    a. The extent to which the strategic plan has been effectively implemented;
    b. The extent to which the uniformly sequenced core curriculum, adopted by the state board, has been effectively implemented;
    c. The extent of compliance with state laws and state board prescribed rules, regulations, standards, and criteria;
    d. The effectiveness of educational programs and services, including comparisons to student bodies which are comparable in terms of demographic characteristics;
    e. The effectiveness of annual performance evaluations and annual professional development plan procedures and the extent to which staff development programs effectively address deficiencies and other needs identified through those processes;
    f. The accuracy of student count procedures;
    g. The accuracy of fiscal procedures, particularly as they apply to implementing the state board-prescribed accounting system and ensuring funds are expended for purposes authorized by state laws and state board policy and regulations;
    h. The extent to which public awareness and information processes comply with state law and state board-adopted policies and regulations; and
    i. Such other functions deemed necessary by the state board for a full and comprehensive evaluation of such units.

4. Comprehensive evaluations are to be conducted by teams made up of the following:

    a. Certified professional employees from other local units of administration;
    b. College or university faculty members; and
    c. Citizens residing in the respective unit.

    The team is to be coordinated by a professional evaluator.

5. The state board is to publish in the legal organ of the evaluated school or system the results of the comprehensive evaluation including a summary of any deficiencies and recommendations for addressing said deficiencies.

6. The state board, as a result of comprehensive evaluations and in comparison to units having demographically similar student bodies, is to designate local units as follows:

    a. Standard - satisfactory performance on evaluation;
    b. Exemplary - superior performance on evaluation; or
    c. Nonstandard - unsatisfactory performance on evaluation.

7. The law authorizes incentive grants for exemplary units, mandates certain assistance, sanctions and reviews for nonstandard units, and authorizes penalties as follows:

    a. Nonstandard units are required to submit corrective plans to address deficiencies.
    b. Regional education service agencies (RESAs) and the Department of Education are required to provide technical assistance to units in developing and implementing corrective plans.
    c. The State Board of Education is to review the progress being made on the corrective plan at least once every six months until the plan has been implemented or the unit has been redesignated as standard or exemplary.
    d. If the State Board finds that a local unit of administration is making unsatisfactory progress relative to developing or implementing the corrective plan, it is authorized to execute one or more of the following actions:

        (1) Increasing local fair share (of funds) if necessary to mitigate problem,
        (2) Withholding of funds, or
        (3) Filing civil action in the local superior court to remove local officials preventing or delaying corrective action.

Comprehensive Evaluation System

The Georgia Comprehensive Evaluation System, as currently envisioned, has two components for public schools and systems with parallel components for regional education services agencies.

1. **Legal Adherence Standards Component**

   The Legal Adherence Standards component is a version of the standards program which was in place in Georgia for 20 years prior to QBE. Standards with indicators of adherence are based on state laws and state board policies and rules and address the following areas:

   a. School district organization,
   b. School board operations,
   c. General school administration,
   d. Fiscal management.
   e. Business management,
   f. Facility program,
   g. Personnel, and
   i. Students.

   The Legal Adherence Standards, which address Georgia Board of Education policies and rules related to the eight specified functions for evaluation, have, for several years, been applied annually to all public schools and systems. Currently 20 percent of systems each year have these standards applied through an on-site visit conducted by DOE staff members, while the remaining 80 percent submit evidence of compliance through a Modified Compliance Review process involving self-report data and in-house reports supplied by various program managers in the Department of Education.

2. **Quality Standards Component**

   Currently under development, the Quality Standards will evaluate the effectiveness of educational programs and services, with the present focus on the school. In an attempt to allow schools and systems flexibility in the structure of their programs, the Quality Standards have been designed to focus on student outcomes and school characteristics. A long, arduous, and sometimes painful, but always challenging, process has identified 14 standards with a varying number of indicators. The pilot test standards follow.

Educational Outcomes

1. Students at the school have acceptable rates of progression in, and completion of, their courses of study.
2. The school effectively prepares students for post-secondary schooling.
3. The school effectively prepares students for work.
4. The school effectively educates students in the grade levels it serves.

School Characteristics and Climate

5. Certified teaching, leadership, and service personnel within the school have sufficient authority to effectively perform their assigned duties, and noncertified personnel within the school participate in school-level decision making.
6. The principal is perceived to provide effective leadership to the school.
7. The school has an acceptable rate of staff turnover.
8. Parents are involved in and support the school.
9. The school promotes school-wide recognition of academic achievement and citizenship of all students.
10. The school environment is organized to maximize learning time.
11. Relationships between and among teachers and administrators are collegial in nature, and the school atmosphere is collaborative.
12. The school staff have a clear sense of belonging to a supportive school community.
13. The school presents clear goals and high expectations for students.
14. The school maintains an orderly and safe environment.

Data to inform the indicators for these standards will come from three major sources which include Department of Education In-House Reports (data local units submit to the Department and reports generated by the Department), Census Questionnaire (a questionnaire to be completed for each school annually), and on-site visits by the evaluation team. In the pilot test, the on-site team will use such techniques as surveys, focus groups, observation checklists, interviews, and document review. Formulas and processes to convert the data from these sources to scores have been developed. The scores will be compared to an ultimate set of standards, and the result of this comparison, along with results of application of Legal Adherence Standards, will be the basis for determining if a school is standard, exemplary, or nonstandard.

The Politics of Developing the Comprehensive Evaluation System

As has been the case in responses to all of the mandates of the Quality Basic Education Act, the development of the Comprehensive Evaluation System is taking place in a political arena. Even though the General Assembly unanimously passed the act in 1985, its members have felt free to amend the law and to affect the implementation of the law through budgetary processes. Persons charged with the implementation of the law are acutely aware that responses must have broad-based support or the legislative or budgeting process will directly or indirectly chip away at the legal basis of the program.

Under the general direction of the State Superintendent of Schools, an elected position in Georgia, the Department of Education has had the responsibility of forging programs to implement QBE. Much of the organization of the department is designed to respond to the mandates. This multi-leveled structure, while on paper designed to facilitate the enactment of programs, has often been an inhibiting force. For example, the General Assembly specified eight functions to be a part of the comprehensive evaluation, and even though the Division of Standards and Evaluation, in the Office of Evaluation and Personnel Development, is the major division responsible for coordinating the evaluation, eight divisions of the department are involved.

The logistics of the interaction required to effect such interfacing are at times overwhelming. To some extent the obstacle is protection of turf, but to a greater extent the hurdle is time.

To address the political ramifications of an evaluation system which ultimately will result in pubic designation of schools as exemplary, standard, or nonstandard as well as provide incentive grants and/or lead to sanctions and penalties, Division of Standards and Evaluation personnel employ a variety of mechanisms to assure widespread involvement. A description of the techniques and groups follows.

1. **Department Technical Advisory Board (DTAB)**

   The DTAB includes a representative from many of the divisions involved directly or indirectly in the comprehensive evaluation, along with an outside technical expert. The DTAB meets twice monthly to review all proposals and products, to identify potential problems, and to advise on solutions.

2. **Comprehensive Evaluation System Advisory Committee**

The CES Advisory Committee, which meets at least three times each year, is made up of 35 local school or system representatives and lay persons. The committee includes superintendents, assistant superintendents, curriculum specialists, principals, teachers, and other school personnel as well as community, business, and industry persons. Its membership is balanced relative to geography, race, gender, school level, and system size. The Governor's education advisors are invited to attend and participate in Advisory Committee meetings.

3. **CES Steering Committee**

A subset of the Advisory Committee forms a steering committee. A working group that meets five times a year, the Steering Committee includes a representative from each of 12 pilot systems. Its purpose is to review, revise, and help shape the intricacies of the Comprehensive Evaluation System, particularly the Quality Standards Component.

4. **Georgia Department of Education Planning Committee**

The Department Planning Committee includes all associate and assistant state superintendents, the legislative liaison, and representative division directors. This committee serves as a screening group for all new programs and proposals under consideration and must give its approval before a program may be carried forward to the superintendent and state board. In a proposal of the magnitude of the Comprehensive Evaluation System, the typical method of interacting with the planning committee is to present updates at strategic stages prior to asking the committee for final approval.

To be implemented, the Comprehensive Evaluation System must have the recommendation of the state superintendent and the approval of the Georgia Board of Education to begin the rulemaking process in compliance with the Georgia Administrative Procedure Act. This Act requires that proposed rules be submitted for public review and that open hearings be held. All comments received must be addressed before the rules can be officially approved for implementation.

To involve such a large number of stakeholders in development requires a substantial investment of time, energy, and money. We believe that investment is wise and will help assure a more effective, efficient, and credible evaluation program.

Characteristics of a Defensible Program

In addition to the political considerations of the program, there are other characteristics of a sound and defensible evaluation program which are critical as we proceed in this activity. Such characteristics can be generally clustered around five strands which are discussed below.

1. **Legal Issues**

   Legal issues range from a correct and defensible interpretation of pertinent laws to matters related to enforcing of sanctions on systems and affording all due process rights to those systems.

2. **Ethical Issues**

   Strike (1990) identified eight ethical principles related to teacher evaluation. Five principles have bearing on the evaluation program Georgia is developing.

   a. Due Process;
   b. Equality (a prohibition against making decisions on irrelevant grounds such as race, religion, gender, or ethnicity);
   c. Public Perspicuity (openness to the public concerning evaluation procedures, their purposes, and their results);
   d. Humaneness (consideration for feelings and sensitivities of individuals); and
   e. Client Benefit ("The principle of client benefit requires that evaluation decisions be made in a way that respects the interests of students, parents, and the public in preference to those of educational institutions and their staffs.")

3. **Technical Issues**

   The other papers in this symposium address the technical issues which include

   a. Validity;
   b. Reliability;
   c. Bias Review; and
   d. Standard-setting Procedures.

4. **Credibility Issues**

   Credibility refers to the degree that the evaluation program is believed in and accepted by those affected by the program. Several factors determine the credibility of a comprehensive evaluation system including

a. Involvement of stakeholders in the development and testing of evaluation processes;
b. Provision of meaningful and usable feedback to evaluated schools and systems;
c. Assurance of well-trained and proficient evaluators to implement the program; and
d. A meaningful and accessible appeals procedure.

5. Practicality Issues

Practicality refers to the degree to which a program is usable and feasible and includes, at a minimum, the following

a. Cost effectiveness;
b. Time required for evaluation and time required for preparation by schools and systems being evaluated;
c. Ease of applying the evaluation model;
d. Ease of scoring and of score interpretation; and
e. Time required for evaluation results and feedback to be received.

Issues Affecting Future Development

With these issues of defensibility in mind and in a dynamic political arena, the Georgia Department of Education is moving slowly but steadily toward implementing all components of the Comprehensive Evaluation System which will evaluate all public schools in relation to schools with similar student bodies on the basis of student outcomes and school characteristics and compliance with applicable laws, board policies, and rules. With the consequences including public disclosure and strong corrective steps, the issues with which we are faced are as changeable as the persons involved are different. Some of these issues also weigh heavily on our future successes.

1. For eight years, Joe Frank Harris made education the primary focus of his administration and nurtured and protected the Quality Basic Education program. In January of this year, a new governor assumed office. Education will continue to be priority; however, with Georgia facing economic problems and with ever-increasing demands in areas of law enforcement and prisons, highways, and health care and insurance costs, no one can accurately say how the priorities will be ordered or how or from where leadership to forge programs will come. Added to this is the presence of a new lieutenant governor, new legislative committee chairpersons, new agency heads, and new members of the governor's staff.

2. If the 1980s was the decade of education reform, it is becoming apparent that the 1990s will be the decade of restructuring. A major theme of much literature on restructuring is the need for a strong accountability system. We in Georgia, like many others, face a fundamental question of the extent to which the comprehensive evaluation will be used for accountability purposes and the extent it will be used for diagnostic purposes. Troubling, but critical, questions deal with the kinds and amounts of flexibility and relief to be afforded schools and systems and the structure and nature of assistance provided to or forced on nonstandard units.

3. The response to the mandate to evaluate local units in comparison with those with demographically similar student bodies is an issue of particular concern. The dilemma is how meaningfully to effect such evaluations without conveying the message that less is expected of schools serving students from low socioeconomic levels. Creating and maintaining support for a system which may allow the same raw scores to be exemplary in one school but nonstandard in another, based on the demographics, are major challenges.

4. Other issues facing this developmental effort are the increasing need to limit or eliminate "paperwork" and decrease the amount of regulation and monitoring of local systems by the Georgia Department of Education. These are occurring at the same time financial constraints are in place and the reorganization and redefining of the Department of Education is in process.

Summary

In summary, Georgia is proceeding with the development of the Comprehensive Evaluation System with changes along the way for ever-changing requirements. Though there are obstacles, our primary challenge is to be certain that the program helps to assure a quality educational opportunity for the young people of Georgia.

REFERENCES

1. Georgia Department of Education internal memorandum, April 11, 1985.

2. Official Code of Georgia, Annotated.

3. Strike, Kenneth A., "The Ethics of Educational Evaluation," in Millman and Darling-Hammond, eds., 1990, pp. 356-373.